

**From:** Slosser, Chris (JUS)  
**Sent:** June 7, 2010 12:24 PM  
**To:** @JUS-L-SGCS-OFM-FI; @JUS-L-SGCS-OFM-FPS  
**Subject:** fire safety information

Following an inquiry about the cooking fire video discussed below, the following is sent for your information.....

## Fire Safety Facts and Fiction

The Office of the Fire Marshal (OFM) receives numerous queries on a regular basis that relate to a variety of fire and safety concerns. When the OFM receives them, they are reviewed, researched and evaluated to determine if there is a real public safety issue or concern.

These messages often circulate and re-circulate over the Internet, and, unfortunately, repeatedly spread fear, questions and concern. Summarized below are three issues that generate frequent inquiries and have undergone review. The OFM position and/or advice on the subject are provided for your information.

### 1. Children sleeping through smoke alarms

**Background:** There is a video clip that shows children sleeping through the sound of traditional smoke alarms. The video then shows them awakening very quickly to the sound of a familiar voice from a smoke alarm that has voice recording capabilities.

**OFM Advice/Position:** Certainly, the concern about sleeping children not hearing smoke alarms is legitimate. Research tells us that children tend to sleep much more deeply, sleep longer and are more difficult to wake up than adults. This research sheds light on the reasons why children don't hear or react to an activated smoke alarm. However, it also tells us that the problem of children sleeping through activated smoke alarms can't easily or consistently be resolved with the use of a taped message from a familiar voice. The OFM has found no substantive scientific evidence to support this claim.

While some studies about this issue have occurred throughout the world, the majority have included limited numbers of participants and documentation. Clearly, this is an issue that is in its infancy. It has not seen sufficient research and is slowly evolving as a crossover topic between fire protection engineering and psychology fields.

It is the law in Ontario for homes to have a working smoke alarm on every storey and outside all sleeping areas. For added protection, smoke alarms should be installed in every bedroom. Caregivers should also make smoke alarms the first component of their family's home fire escape plan. As children can be 'deep sleepers', caregivers should never assume that activated smoke alarms will alert their sleeping children. As part of the home fire escape plan, caregivers should make it their responsibility to

awaken and actively evacuate children in a fire emergency. If caregivers plan to leave their children in the care of a babysitter, they should test the alarms in the presence of, and review the home fire escape plan with, the babysitter. This will ensure that everyone knows what to do in case of fire and be able to escape safely.

The OFM is not aware that any of these recordable voice products have met the Canadian smoke alarm standard (Standard for Smoke Alarms, CAN/ULC-S-531) or that they will consistently solve the difficult issue of waking sleeping children. They also may not awaken teenagers, older adults, people who take medication or those with sleep disorders (e.g. sleep apnea etc.)

Solutions for all these groups are available with a combination of different types of the smoke alarms and through fire escape planning that may involve the assistance of family members. While the OFM continues to welcome innovative products that enhance fire safety, it is important for everyone's safety that the products are listed and meet the Canadian smoke alarm standard (Standard for Smoke Alarms, CAN/ULC-S-531). For more information about smoke alarms and home fire safety, visit [www.ofm.gov.on.ca](http://www.ofm.gov.on.ca).

## 2. Glade® PlugIn® Air Fresheners

**Background:** The following urban legend has been circulating over the Internet:

*"My brother and his wife learned a hard lesson this last week. Their house burned down...nothing left but ashes. They have good insurance, so the home will be replaced and most of the contents. That is the good news. However, they were sick when they found out the cause of the fire."*

The email then goes on to say that the insurance investigator traced the cause of the fire to a Glade PlugIn in the master bathroom. The email indicates that the investigator said he has seen more home fires started with the plug in type room fresheners than anything else because they are made from a thin plastic. According to the email, the investigator said he personally wouldn't have any type of plug in fragrance device anywhere in his house because he has seen too many burned down homes.

**OFM Advice/Position:** In 2002, SC Johnson recalled a Glade product (Glade Extra Outlet Scented Oil Air Freshener) due to a potential fire hazard caused by products that had been misassembled during the manufacturing process. At the time the recall was posted, there had been no reports of injury or property damage.

The urban legend references a Glade PlugIn product with a night light, which is a product that was not included in the recall. The OFM has been in touch with SC Johnson and they have confirmed that there are no safety issues with these products. Health Canada and the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission also are not

reporting any new concerns. The warning circulating on the Internet appears to be unfounded.

Details on both the recalled model and responses to the circulating urban legend can be viewed at the links included below:

<http://www.cpsc.gov/cpsc/pub/prerel/prhtml02/02144.html>

[http://www.scijohnson.com/family/fam\\_pre\\_pre\\_news.asp?art\\_id=133](http://www.scijohnson.com/family/fam_pre_pre_news.asp?art_id=133)

<http://www.snopes.com/toxins/glade.asp>

### 3. Cooking Fire Video

**Background:** There is a public service announcement (PSA) circulating by email that shows a fire fighter dealing with a stovetop fire. The fire fighter approaches a fire on the stove, turns off the stove and proceeds to the sink where he soaks and wrings out a cloth and then covers the burning pot with the damp cloth. In the PSA the fire is shown to be effectively extinguished.

**OFM Advice/Position:** The OFM has some serious concerns with this method of dealing with a stovetop fire:

- a. The fire fighter turns the stove off first since the stove controls were conveniently located at the front of the stove. This is not as easy to do when the stove control knobs are located at the rear of the stove.
- b. The fire fighter then proceeds to the sink where he locates, soaks, and wrings out a cloth or tea towel, heads back to the stove and positions the cloth over the pot on fire. This is concerning as precious time is lost locating a cloth, soaking it, and wringing it out. There is no indication of whether a cloth is too wet or too dry, nor is there recognition of the difficulty associated with placing a damp cloth over a pot on fire. This could greatly increase the person's chances of being burned or clothing catching fire.
- c. There are other factors that could impact on personal safety using the technique of a wet cloth draped over a burning pot such as:
  1. whether different types of cloth (materials) could have a different outcome; and
  2. whether older adults could perform this action.
- d. There is no one in the kitchen when the chip pan starts to burn and there is no mention that this was the reason why the fire started. The fire could have been prevented if the cooking had been attended. There was no mention of this.

It is the opinion of the OFM that:

- the most effective way to prevent a stovetop fire is to stay in the kitchen and watch what you are cooking, especially when cooking with oil or at high temperatures;
- when cooking, always keep a proper fitting lid nearby and if a pan on the stove catches fire, carefully slide the lid over the pan and then turn off the stove;
- if you do not feel confident that you can do this safely, get everyone out of the home and call the fire department from a neighbour's home.

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